Introduction

Churches that thrive spiritually are led by leaders who are thriving spiritually

When the relationship between a church and its paid leaders goes well what an amazing difference it makes. This document has been prepared to accompany the Living Leadership Code of Best Practice for Caring for Church Leaders. The questions included are intended to encourage that relationship of reciprocal trust, credibility, transparency and love. We assume that churches want to help their leaders to serve with joy and to work with them for healthy care of heart and soul.

Sadly there are occasions when the relationship between a church and a paid member of ministry staff breaks down. In many instances a contributing factor is a lack of shared mutual expectations of what the work does or does not entail, often dating back
to the time of appointment. It is not uncommon for paid ministry staff to lack clear job descriptions and for churches to simply assume that everyone involved in appointing leaders will share a common set of expectations and assumptions about what is and is not expected. Our belief is that as much clarity as possible in advance is vital in preventing relational breakdown later on. No amount of goodwill is a substitute for churches and leaders having a shared set of expectations. It is in the interests of nobody to withhold pertinent information about either themselves or the church when making a leadership appointment.

**Section 1** contains questions to help a church consider how to organise an appointment process which is clear and honouring

**Section 2** contains questions for someone exploring a ministry post to ask of the church during the interview process

**Section 3** contains brief comments to help a church with leaders currently in post consider how to further develop a culture of care

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Section 1: Preparing a Culture of Care When Appointing Leaders

THE CHURCH’S CULTURAL CONTEXT:

These questions provide an opportunity for the leadership team to reflect with the congregation on the church’s present condition. As the church faces the need to appoint a new leader, these questions will form the basis on which a profile and a job description will be drawn up for potential candidates to consider. Authenticity is key to the process. Do your best to give honest reflections rather than the most ideal picture you would like to present about yourself.

1. How would we describe our church’s cultural context?

2. What’s the context of the communities around us?

3. How do we relate to one another? As leaders? As a church?

4. What are we looking for in a new leader? (This question requires care. It is common for a church to simply list all their own personal preferences and desires and then construct a list of desired qualities and gifts so varied and extensive that the Archangel Gabriel needn’t apply! Instead, try to isolate a few absolutely key priorities)

5. What are our theological/ministry priorities?
6. Are we prepared / wanting to have a leader actually lead us through facilitating the ministry of the entire church or are we seeking an employee to do a list of jobs that support our existing activities?

7. What do we want succession planning to look like? Do we wish for an interregnum or a smooth transition?

8. How do we function as a team?

9. Where do we think we are as a church? In reaching the lost? Making disciples? Training leaders? Loving our community?

10. What’s going well and not going well just now? What needs to change?

11. What are our “red-line” issues that cannot be changed?

12. Where do we wish to be realistically in three-five years’ time? What stands in the way?

13. What are the expectations of a new leader? From the leadership team? From key ministry leaders? From the congregation?


15. Honestly, how is our prayer life? As a leadership team? As a congregation?

16. Is there anything in our life as a church, past or present, which would bring dishonour to the Lord Jesus?
THE CANDIDATE’S COMPETENCY:

These questions will help the search team/leadership team to assess the suitability of candidates in terms of experience and gifting.

1. What skill-set are we looking for? Have we identified it in a job description?

2. Does the candidate meet the requirements of our job description? If so, how?

3. What’s the candidate’s secular experience? Do they bring transferable skills to the ministry of our church?

4. What’s the candidate’s church experience? Do they have a proven track record of building teams and growing church?

5. Is this person a good theological fit?

6. Does the candidate satisfy our safeguarding and risk assessment policies and current legislation?

CHARACTER AND CHEMISTRY:

These questions will help the search team/leadership team to assess the suitability of candidates in terms of their character and our ability to work together.

1. What is the candidate’s SHAPE? (Spiritual gifts, Heart/Passion, Abilities, Personality, Experience)

2. Are they an introvert or an extrovert? How would that relate to our particular church culture?
3. Do they get their replenishment with people or on their own?

4. What are their interests? What do they like to do with their free time?

5. What evidence is there that they are growing in grace and in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus?

6. Is there anything in their personal life, past or present, which would call their ministry into question?

7. Will we be able to work together effectively for fruitful outcomes?

8. Will we be able to flourish together? Will we be good for each other?

CARING:

These questions provide an opportunity for the leadership team to reflect with the congregation on how to create an ongoing culture of reflection that has soul care and spiritual health at its heart. They assume that a church investing in the long-term spiritual health and well-being of its leaders and their families is a necessity not a luxury.

1. How do we create a reflective culture that regularly reviews:
   - the leader – how are they? How is their family? Do they know who to turn to in times of need inside/outside the church?
   - the leadership team – how are we functioning? Are we modelling the grace and discipleship ourselves? Are we growing new leaders?
   - Whether we are all being mentored and developed in our Christian walk?
   - the overall ministry of the church – where are we going? What are our strengths? Where are the blockages that impede progress? What do we need to change?
2. How do we honour the leader and their family? Are the pay and conditions of employment honourable? (Do not assume that provision of a manse or vicarage is a substitute for otherwise dishonourable conditions)

3. How do we resource them? Materially? Emotionally? Spiritually? Do we pay for them to have a mentor?

4. How do we pray for and with them and their families?

5. Are they pacing themselves for the long-term sustainable future? Do they have healthy patterns and habits of work, rest and spiritual replenishment? How would we know?

6. Are we clear about what falls outside the leader’s area of responsibility? Are the expectations of the job description realistic? Are we open and receptive to renegotiation now or in the future if it proves not to be so?

7. Do we have a clear understanding of what capacity the leader actually has? (i.e. a realistic idea of how long it takes to prepare a sermon or meeting, how long they are spending in confidential pastoral visitation, how long it is appropriate for them to take in prayer for the ministry, time with the community, etc.)

8. How will we protect the leader, their spouse and family from the vulnerability that goes with unhealthy public scrutiny and visibility?
Section 2: Questions for a Prospective Church Leader to Ask About a Church’s Culture of Care

These questions are intended to help ministers and churches/church leadership teams consider how to work together for the minister’s joy in God. We do not assume that churches are necessarily familiar with how gospel ministry is actually experienced by those who do it, nor that they should understand all the ins and outs of the work of leading a church.

WHAT EXPECTATIONS EXIST OF SHARED LIFE BETWEEN PAID LEADERS AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP TEAM:

1. What expectations do you as church officers have of me caring for you?

2. In addition to regular leadership meetings what level of mutual concern for our discipleship and walk with the Lord do you envisage?

3. Are you prepared for me to help you to grow as disciples and leaders?

4. What expectation do you have of mutually sharing life, food, etc inside and outside of meetings?
WHAT EXPECTATIONS DOES THE CHURCH HAVE OF CARING FOR ME AND MY FAMILY?

These questions are intended to help establish realistic agreement about what is within capacity and what isn’t.

1. Why did the last person leave this post? What would they tell me about the church’s culture of care? Are you willing for me to be in touch with them?

2. What is expected by way of length of working week? What level of work is expected - either explicitly or implicitly - on top of contractual hours?

3. How often would I be free to accept invitations to preach in other churches?

4. What safeguards will you put in place to help to ensure that patterns and habits of work and rest that are sustainable and fun?

5. Which member(s) of the leadership team have specific responsibility to care for and support me and my spouse? What routine support will you offer? Are you willing for me to have a mentor/discipler the church pays for? Can we agree some specifics in terms of regularity/frequency?

6. What opportunities would the church support for my ongoing development and spiritual refreshment?
WHAT SHAPE WILL MY FRAMEWORK OF ACCOUNTABILITY TAKE?

These questions are intended to establish a good framework of accountability from the outset of a ministry. Regular checkups are a good thing. In denominational structures these will often be facilitated by trusted third parties. We recommend:

- Church leaders should expect an annual review of which the Pastoral Well-Being Code of Best Practice is a constituent part. This should be a spiritual checkup as well as a job-related check up, covering performance and goal-setting as well as pastoral care of the leader
- Clear job description, regularly reviewed and renegotiated where necessary
- Agreement of a mutually respected, safe third party to participate in carrying out review

1. Is there a clear process in place for a regular review of my work/performance? What is it?

2. Are there clear processes and responsible persons to oversee safeguarding and risk assessment?

3. Who is responsible for my annual review? Who else will be present?

4. What arrangements are in place for third parties to participate?

5. What arrangements are in place for the work of the wider leadership team and non-paid leaders to be reviewed and action plans agreed?
WHAT EXPECTATIONS DOES THE CHURCH HAVE ON ITS LEADERS?

1. Will I be seen as:
   - The ministry-provider: the one who is paid to do everything?
   - The ministry-facilitator: the one who is there to equip and delegate to others?

2. What roles are carried by other paid and unpaid leaders, especially in areas outside my gifting?

3. In what missions, causes and activities will the church expect me to develop an interest?

4. What other individuals, causes and activities will encourage me to embrace their area of interest?

5. Who is responsible in my absence?

6. If the church has more than one member of staff are employees allowed to be absent at the same time (e.g. during school holidays?)

WHAT EXPECTATIONS DOES THE CHURCH HAVE OF CARING FOR MY SPOUSE AND FAMILY?

1. What will the church’s expectations be of my wife? How will the church leadership care for her?

2. How will you help me to protect time with my family?

3. What expectations does the church have on use of vicarage or manse for church activities? What boundaries can we agree about the use of our home for church meetings/business?
Section 3: Developing a Culture of Care for Existing Leaders

The questions laid out in this document are intrinsically easier to consider at the start of a ministry than after a relationship has existed for a period. This is especially true when there are issues of relational friction, concerns about performance or expectations that are not mutually shared or perceived to be unsustainable. Under such circumstances constructive review is essential but harder to accomplish where issues of trust and vulnerability prevent discussion. It is necessary to find ways to introduce discussion, review and, where necessary, renegotiation that are debarbed and receptive.

Where the leader in question is feeling vulnerable we recommend discussion of the categories above but consider it essential to have a trusted third party help to set it up and facilitate it. Where vulnerability exists we recognise it is harder for leaders to bring up issues of concern without being misinterpreted (or believing they will be misinterpreted). Third parties can help church officers consider how to care in ways that paid leaders cannot and are able to help vulnerable comments not be perceived as criticism ("you haven’t done this for me").

Where existing leaders feel no such vulnerability it may be helpful to raise issues of leader-care as part of wider annual discussion and review of how the church team is working together. Consider the Covenant of Care as part of a broader discussion about what team is, how it best functions, what leadership is, what personal professional development team members and leaders need and what five year plans the church has for moving forwards.